

QualityCoast Award 2015 Jury Report

Ameland
The Netherlands



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Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC)
Leiden – Barcelona – Klaipeda



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What is QualityCoast?

QualityCoast is a sustainability award for coastal communities, towns and islands. It is the only sustainable tourism destination award developed by local authorities themselves. It is the result of the European Union INTERREG project "Coastal Practice Network" (CoPraNet 2002-2005), led by the EUCC. The QualityCoast criteria have been developed to measure the success of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) at local level, in connection to the EU Recommendation for ICZM.

People are increasingly interested in sustainability issues, also when selecting their holiday destination. Tourism eco-labels have become common features in travel brochures and websites. Whilst the Blue Flag specifically applies to individual beaches and marinas and Travelife and the Green Key to accommodations, QualityCoast is considering efforts for sustainable tourism in the whole territory of the coastal destination: towns, small regions and islands.

With the QualityCoast programme (www.qualitycoast.info), the Coastal & Marine Union - EUCC aims to establish an international network of coastal communities that share similar values on sustainable and socially responsible tourism, at the same time maintaining high standards in the quality of their tourism offer.

With the QualityCoast Award programme, EUCC aims to encourage tourism destinations for:

- a. their attractiveness for visitors interested in natural and cultural heritage, a clean environment, local identity, or business involvement in sustainable tourism;
- b. their policies re: sustainable tourism and any of the aspects mentioned under point a;
- c. a combination of a and b.

Since the inclusion of all Destinations Criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in the QualityCoast Award 2013 Application Form, QualityCoast is now open for applications from all continents.

"QualityCoast" has been registered by EUCC as a European Union trademark; the use of the name is restricted under European law.

QualityCoast meets European and global standards

The GSTC Destination Criteria (GSTC-D version 1.0), published 1 November 2013, have already been fully incorporated into the QualityCoast – QualityDestination 2015 Application Form.

In February 2013, the European Commission launched the European Tourism Indicators (ETIS) aiming to measure and enhance the sustainability of destinations across Europe. All ETIS-indicators have also been included into our Award Application Form, mostly for optional use.

QualityCoast certifies tourism sustainability policy

We offer reliable and transparent international Award programmes and a certification option for destinations with serious ambitions for a good sustainable tourism policy. The Awards and certifications are issued for periods of two years.

The programme also offers an assessment of the visible sustainability (performance, or sustainability status) in a broad range of categories and criteria, since tourists are not only interested in policies, strategies, ambitions and plans, but especially on how they experience a destination. The years of experience in this field allow the programme to inform the tourism sector and the public in a transparent way on policies and performance of ca. 1000 destinations, through the national and international ranking lists of the Global Sustainable Tourism Review (<http://www.qualitycoast.info/alldestinations.htm>). Ranking lists are topped by the QualityCoast Policy Award winners, that have been certified on both policy and status. Next are the destinations that received the QualityCoast BasiQ Award – they are mainly selected on the basis of their status and performance in environmental management, natural and cultural heritage, and local business involvement in sustainability.

The importance of QualityCoast for tourism sustainability

Participation of destination management organisations in the Award programme improves their awareness performance and achievements in an international context. The comparison with other awarded destinations provides the community with a good picture of its strengths and weaknesses. The international assessment and recommendations by our international Jury provide the local authority with a guidance to be considered in an agenda for improvement.

Communities join a network of like-minded communities and share their experiences and best practices in order to improve sustainability and social responsibility in tourism. Their performance in these fields is connected to international tourism marketing through certification under the supervision of an independent international Jury issuing the Awards.

Promotional benefits of participation in QualityCoast

EUCC carries out a marketing campaign together with the Awarded destinations to promote them as the most attractive destinations for visitors interested in nature and landscape, environment, and cultural identity and to highlight their performance in tourism quality and sustainability. The marketing campaign includes promotion at holiday fairs, media publicity, wide dissemination of brochures, promotion via our various web sites and social media. Awarded destinations are also recommended by a number of tour operators of TUI-The Netherlands, in their travel brochures.

The community's own international tourism marketing can profit from the status of QualityCoast destination. Experience in several countries learns that this will continue to generate media publicity nationally and internationally. Sustainability based marketing efforts will increase the "green profile" of the destination both externally and internally and this will help mainstreaming sustainability on local policy and decision making.

What is the QualityCoast Award?

The QualityCoast Award is an independent international certification programme for sustainable tourism of coastal and island destinations that:

- ❖ Has a good overall policy performance in sustainable tourism, mainly according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Destination Criteria, according to our Standard (<http://qualitycoast.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/qualitycoast-standard-2013.pdf>);
- ❖ Offers a sufficient touristic quality to visitors (mainly measured through the BasiQ indicator set);
- ❖ Provides transparent information to residents and visitors (partly through our communication campaigns);
- ❖ Planning for improvement (according to the Recommendations of the International Award Jury).

The Award Standard is publicly available in www.qualitycoast.info.

The Award programme is considering policy and performance criteria representing five different categories:

- ❖ Nature
- ❖ Environment
- ❖ Local Identity & Cultural Heritage
- ❖ Host Community & Safety
- ❖ Tourism & Business.

Each criterion is measured through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators, on which the applicant must provide information regarding its entire territory.

What are the QualityCoast criteria?

See the titles of the 2015 Policy Award criteria on the page 8.

Definitions of the criteria and a complete list of indicators can be found in the QualityCoast Application Form 2015-'16.

The criteria and indicators will remain subject to annual revision, based upon European and global standards.

How is the QualityCoast Award attributed?

The QualityCoast Award is attributed on the basis of information to be provided by the applicant(s) through an Application Form. For many of the policy related indicators the applicant is invited to make a self-assessment by giving the destination a rate from 1 to 5 ("1" meaning absence of any relevant policy for the indicator, and "5" meaning full availability of policy concerned); and in the case of a rate of 4 or 5 to clarify the rate or give examples. For the GSTC-D indicators even in the case of self-assessment 1, 2 or 3, a clarification of the main obstacles for improvements is requested (not mandatory). It is useful to provide such clarification for the assessment team, but it is also useful for the annual improvement of the criteria.

The Application Form lists 88 Core indicators, and 127 optional ("Your Choice") indicators.

Core indicators: in principle all Core indicators need to be taken into consideration. However, destinations can ignore up to 25% of the GSTC-D indicators per criterion, if these are less relevant to them, indicating why they are less relevant. However, destinations are advised only to ignore GSTC-D indicators in case of low performance.

Your Choice indicators: applicants can choose on which of the Your Choice indicators they will provide information, with a minimum of one per criterion. This means that applicants will provide information on an additional 20 indicators only.

All information provided through the Application Form (including the self-assessment rates) is evaluated and assessed by the QC Secretariat. The Secretariat involves (or hires the services of) a local expert, as a 3rd party auditor. The assessment reports produced by Secretariat and local expert are then reviewed by a number of members of the International Award Jury. For each application, a Jury is designated composed of at least three members including: an independent local expert (who is aware of the applicant community); a national expert; and an international EUCC-expert. In order to ensure its independence, the Jury will work anonymously until the moment it is concluding its assessment.

The Secretariat and the Jury assign scores to all indicators, ranging from 1 to 5; "1" meaning absence of any quality (or no information provided for an indicator); and "5" indicating excellence for an indicator.

The score per criterion is based on the scores and weight factors of its indicators.

The average scores of all 20 criteria will then be calculated. This will be the final score. Applicants scoring '1' in two or more of the 20 criteria will not be eligible for the QualityCoast or QualityDestination Award, regardless the scores in the other criteria.

First time applicants with an average score no less than 5.7 (score threshold) will be granted an Award. Destinations applying for the 2nd time need score 5.8, for the 3rd time 5.9 and for the 4th time 6.0 (minimum).

The Jury will issue a report with a complete list of criteria scores and with suggestions for further improvement.

Some of the indicators measure the quality of policies; others measure the performance (policy implementation) or the visible sustainability status. This is why the QC team is able to produce indexes for sustainability policy and for sustainability status.

For successful applicants the Jury report as well as the above-mentioned indexes will be published.

No public reference will be made about unsuccessful applications.

QualityCoast Award levels

If the Award score threshold is met, the Jury will also check whether the average scores of the individual categories (Nature, Environment, Identity, Tourism & Business and Host Community & Safety) reach a minimum of 8.0 ("excellence").

The following Award levels will be considered:

- Bronze, in case of excellence in one of the five categories;
- Silver, in case of excellence in two of the five categories;
- Gold, in case of excellence in three [but then no other category should be below 5.0] or four categories;
- Platinum, in case of excellence in all five categories.

Successful applicants become QualityCoast Destinations

Applicants who meet the score threshold are invited to the next tourism fair (ITB Berlin, Vakantiebeurs Utrecht, WTM London etc) or a National or Local Award Ceremony, where they will receive the Award Certificate, and an Award Flag. They can then participate in the joint marketing programme. Awarded Destinations can order extra flags and banners, which can be displayed throughout the destination's territory during 24 months.

18 Months after their application the Awarded destination will be encouraged to submit a renewed Application. The assessment of the new application will take into consideration the coherence between the improvements indicated in the previous one and the integration of the suggestions and the recommendations made by the Jury.

Renewal of the QualityCoast Award: important note

The QualityCoast Policy Award assessment will take into consideration that earlier scores related to sustainability performance reflect the state of knowledge and experience of previous periods. If no progress is demonstrated in certain indicators, this could result in lower scores. E.g. ambitions and implementation levels in renewable energy use are increasing with time, therefore a clear progress on this item should be shown within a period of four years; another example is the assessment of satisfaction of the destination, which should be carried out in periods no longer than two or three years.

It is also important for applicants to realise that the QualityCoast Team is annually improving the indicator set in order to better cover up-to-date considerations on sustainability and relevant criteria, and to increase harmonisation with the global GSTC-D criteria and European ETIS indicators. This is why the score for particular criteria can change compared to two years ago even when the situation hasn't changed.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT & COMMENTS

Comparability with the result from two years ago

The scores of this year's assessment are not fully comparable with the score of two years ago, because the QualityCoast criteria had to be adapted to the final version of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination criteria – released in December 2013. This was necessary to maintain the support and recognition by large tour operators, which will only help promote certifications and awards that are GSTC compliant.

Conclusion

The QualityCoast Jury confirms that there is sufficient evidence to approved the QualityCoast Award 2015, and congratulates the applicant with the result.

This QualityCoast Award is a recognition for the high level of tourism quality and sustainability, in particular in terms of nature & landscape, local identity & cultural heritage, and host community& safety.

QualityCoast Award: validity and promotion

The validity of this QualityCoast Award is two years (24 months). You are entitled to display the QualityCoast flags, banners and flyers during this period, throughout your territory. The value of the QualityCoast Award for you as a sustainable tourism destination will highly increase if you are able to help make the QualityCoast Award better known among your inhabitants and visitors, through the flags, banners and flyers, and in your own publications, and website and social media.

GENERAL JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain and improve this high level, the Jury would like to make the following general recommendations to all QualityCoast Destinations:

QualityCoast Committee

Developing and managing a destination sustainably requires structural active involvement and participation of all stakeholder groups in the destination. In order to ensure this is done consistently, the Jury recommends to establish a local QualityCoast Committee on order to provide a think-tank and discussion platform for sustainable tourism on the implementation of the QualityCoast Jury Recommendations. A local QualityCoast Committee could also help promote synergies between stakeholders and contribute to the prolongation of the QualityCoast Award within two years. Within a next QualityCoast application the Jury would like to see involvement of the Committee and also to see the work of the Committee reported.

Tasks of this Committee could be:

- To help establish a multi-year tourism strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural heritage, quality, health, and safety issues, and was developed with public participation;
- To help develop a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues;
- To help monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported.

We suggest that this Committee would represent:

- The local government (highest possible level);
- The local business sector;
- Independent expertise or NGO on nature conservation and management;
- Independent expertise or NGO on cultural heritage and landscape interests;
- Independent expertise or NGO on environmental issues.

SCORES

	Overall (max. 10)	Sustainability Policy (max. 10)	Visible Sustainability (max. 10)
NATURE	8.6	8.4	9.2
1. NATURE & CONSERVATION	8.9	8.3	9.0
2. ACCESS, INFORMATION & EDUCATION	8.3	8.4	8.0
3. GREEN POLICIES	8.7	8.7	0.0
4. OPEN LANDSCAPES	9.3	8.0	9.9
ENVIRONMENT	7.6	7.9	7.7
5. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	8.5	8.2	9.3
6. BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	8.2	0.0	8.2
7. WATER MANAGEMENT	7.9	8.0	7.3
8. SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY	7.4	8.7	6.3
9. WASTE & RECYCLING	7.8	7.3	10.0
10. ENERGY & CLIMATE MITIGATION	6.6	7.0	5.0
11. CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION	7.8	8.0	7.6
IDENTITY & CULTURE	8.2	7.9	8.7
12. CULTURAL HERITAGE	8.7	8.2	9.9
13. TERRITORY & TRADITION	8.2	8.7	7.3
14. LOCAL IDENTITY	8.2	0.0	8.2
TOURISM & BUSINESS	7.4	7.6	5.4
15. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	7.9	8.1	5.0
16. BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	6.4	6.9	4.0
17. HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	7.8	7.5	8.8
HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY	8.2	7.8	9.8
18. FREEDOM & JUSTICE	8.0	8.0	0.0
19. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	9.1	8.6	9.5
20. HEALTH & SAFETY	8.5	8.1	10.0
FINAL POINTS & SCORE 2015	8.0	7.9	8.4
Number of categories score 8 or more	3		
QualityCoast Award type	Gold		

NATURE

Consideration of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**

- Natural and cultural landmarks are identified and well protected.
- High availability of interpretative information to visitors at natural and cultural sites and tourist offices (VVV's).
- Well-developed policies to protect and restore open landscapes on Ameland.
- Opportunities for visitors to experience flora and fauna through high amount of hiking and cycling paths.

- **Issues for improvement:**

- The extent to which interpretative information are developed with the help of community collaboration.
- Clear limitations of vehicles for visitors and inhabitants on beaches during low season due to safety reasons and pollution of beaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- To develop interpretative information to visitors with community collaboration and communicated in languages pertinent to visitors.
- To include recommendations or guidelines for visitor behaviour to minimize the impact of visitors on these key sites.

ENVIRONMENT

Consideration of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**
 - High amount of walking and hiking paths to draw interest to active transportation.
 - Incentives for locals and visitors to use public transportation to minimize gas emissions.
 - Installation of a solar panel park to increase use of green energy, which is implied in a program in which Ameland wants to become independent in terms of energy and water use by 2020.
 - Four beaches are awarded with the Blue Flag.
- **Issues for improvement:**
 - To assist enterprises to reuse and recycle waste and water.
 - Program to reduce the use of bottled water.
 - Waste separation on beaches.
 - Currently very low use of renewable energy, which already tackled through the construction of the solar panel park in 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- To monitor water resources and ensure that use by tourism related enterprises is compatible with the water requirements of the destination community. (GSTC-D)
- The Municipality is advised to encourage tourism-related enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, publicly report energy consumption and reduce reliance on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers). (GSTC-D)
- To develop a program to reduce the use of bottled water.

IDENTITY & CULTURE

Consideration of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**

- Well-developed management system to protect cultural sites and scenic views. Three villages on the island are protected ("beschermdde dorpsgezichten").
- Expansion and promotion of products made on Ameland ('Ameland's produkt') to strengthen local identity.
- High amount of landmarks and museums of Ameland to represent cultural and natural sites.
- The most important landmark the Wadden Sea as part of UNESCO world heritage.

- **Issues for improvement:**

- There are no guidelines for interpretation; and codes of behavior for visits to culturally sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- To develop a system to conserve key cultural sites (historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual and cultural sites, including scenic cultural landscapes).
- To improve information provision: local identity & culture to visitors in various languages, also including recommendations or guidelines for visitor behavior to minimize the impact of visitors.

TOURISM & BUSINESS

Consideration of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**
 - Great collaboration and communication of public and private sector in the coordination and development of tourism.
 - Spreading the season throughout the year through the provision of events (e.g. Kunstmaand, Adventurerun, demonstration horse-driven lifeboat)
 - Completion of three year program on accessible tourism such as expansion of wheelchairs on beaches, provision of wheelchair bicycles etc.
 - Promotion of products and services in accordance with destinations' ecological, social and cultural circumstances (Ameland's products and its expansion of it throughout the last year).
- **Issues for improvement:**
 - There is no overall sustainable tourism strategy / action plan.
 - Local business sector involvement in sustainability issues is limited.
 - Low participation of enterprises that make use of an eco-label.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- To prepare a multi-year strategy for sustainable tourism that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural heritage, quality, health, and safety issues, and aesthetic issues and was developed with public participation. (GSTC-D)
- To create an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism with involvement by the private sector and public sector. This group should have defined responsibilities for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues. (GSTC-D)
- To enter into discussion with the local business sector, and especially hotels, camp sites and others in the tourism sector, to see what common actions can be taken involving the public and private sector, possibly involving the public at large, in the field of:
 - Green energy: e.g. switch to green energy; or generate electricity through solar panels or collectors;
 - Low energy schemes and equipment;
 - Water saving schemes and equipment; an example is designing a towel washing policy in hotels – and make sure it's implemented;
 - Waste reduction;
 - Waste separation to enable better recycling;
 - Equal opportunities for men vs. women;
 - Accessibility for guests with disabilities;
 - Buy or use (source) local/regional, sustainable, and/or fair trade goods and services.

Especially for the first two, green energy and energy conservation, it is recommended to prepare a common action involving the municipality, business sector and residents, which has advantages in cost efficiency, effectiveness and publicity.

- The municipality is advised to monitor how many (%) tourism enterprises are involved in the above actions, apart from those having a broadly recognized eco-label (Travelife, Green Key).

HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY

Consideration of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**

- Very safe location for inhabitants and visitors.

- **Issues for improvement:**

- Inhabitant monitoring. Even though there are already several programs in place to monitor the satisfaction of visitors, there is no/or too little extent programs which monitor the satisfaction, concerns and/or aspirations of inhabitants in terms of tourism development and management on Ameland.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- To regularly monitor to what extent visitors are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination as a whole, and to what extent they are aware of sustainability efforts in the destination. This could perhaps be done together with or through tourist accommodations. (GSTC-D)
- To monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported. (GSTC-D).